PACIFIC – ISLAND NATIONS
SECURITY COLLABORATION WORKSHOP

OVERVIEW OF
KEY SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE PACIFIC:
A TONGAN PERSPECTIVE

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Brigadier General T. ‘Uta’atu
Commander
Tonga Defence Services

Introductory Remarks

1. Thank you for that kind introduction. As co-host, may I take this opportunity to extend on behalf of the men and women of the Tonga Defence Services our warm welcome to all of our invited guest speakers and distinguished delegation who have traveled so far to participate in this very important gathering. A special welcome to Ambassador Salmon, and his staff from the APCSS to the Kingdom. My profound gratitude to Dr Alfred Oehlers and the staff from the APCSS for their untiring effort in coordinating with Colonel Latu and his staff to ensure that we will have a very successful workshop.

2. We are deeply honoured to have been given this opportunity to co-host this workshop for the very first time. Looking at the calibre of the speakers and the delegation who are here today I have no doubt we will have a very dynamic exchange of ideas and positive outcome to the workshop. Military diplomacy is a vital part of security studies and workshops like this help to practice military diplomacy effectively. On that note, I believe that the success of a conference or workshop is not how great the presentations are or how big the attendance but how many friends that you will create from here. That network or friend that you have or will start here today should last for a very long time. In creating friendships, we create trust and confidence in each other so that we can work together to create a better and safer world.
Scope

3. The theme of this Workshop is “Security Collaboration in the Pacific Island Nations”. For this plenary session, I have been asked to speak on the “Overview of Key Security Challenges in the Pacific”. On that note, I would like to define the Security Challenges, focusing on what security means for the small island states in the 21st Century, and in particular the key security challenges which are faced by the small island states in the South Pacific Region (SPR). In doing so, I intend to touch upon the trend of the security issues that have threatened the stability in the SPR since the Second World War, before adopting a broader, more contemporary definition of security, rather than confining myself simply to discussing security in the traditional military sense. I should also add that I will discuss this topic from a particularly Tongan perspective.

Security and the Pacific Island Nations

4. For the purpose of this paper, the PIN are defined as the 22 small island developing states and territories of the Pacific Region extending across the 29.5 million square kilometers of sea waters with a total land area of .5 million square kilometers. PIN’s include the 14 small island states of the Pacific Forum countries plus their associate and observer members. For clarity the Pacific Islands Forum countries (excluding New Zealand and Australia) include: the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu plus New Caledonia and French Polynesia as associate members and Tokelau as an observer member. American Samoa, Wallis & Futuna, Easter Islands, Pitcairn Island and the Mariana Islands are non members. The PIN are encompassed within the three broad cultural areas of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia and extend from McLucas and Timor in the west to Rapanui (Easter Island) in the east; and to Hawaii in the north to New Zealand in the south.
Trend of Security Issues in the Pacific

5. Aside from the Second World War, the forty years of Cold War confrontation between the west and the east, and nuclear testing, the SPR has always been marginal to global security events. The nuclear testing of the major power countries during the cold war period made the security of the SPR important. From the 1940s to 1963, the U.S. used Johnston and Christmas Islands for atmospheric testing and hydrogen bombs. Britain briefly used Christmas Island for its nuclear testing program before they moved with the US to the Nevada desert. In the same year, France established its testing site at Moruroa atoll in the Tuamotus, and conducted 41 atmospheric tests. France’s nuclear testing continued until 1985. For the last thirty years then, this nuclear involvement placed the South Pacific at the highest security interest of the French Government, to the point where its agents were ordered to blow up a Greenpeace protest ship in Auckland harbour in July 1985.

6. This incident helped to enhance New Zealand’s prominent refusal to accept nuclear-armed and nuclear-powered vessels to their harbour and was also seen as the beginning of significant anti-nuclear feelings throughout the Pacific island states. The end of nuclear testing in the Pacific helped to undo the global nuclear alliance. And for the Pacific islanders the nuclear issues provided the main shared security issues of the post-colonial period. In 1992, the French Government announced their suspension of their testing in Moruroa, and in 1996 the U.S. signed the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty. In 1988, prior to the end of the cold war, the Soviet Union established Embassies in Vietnam and Papua New Guinea. During the 1980s, the western security policy including that of the US towards the PIN was predicated on a perception of the possibility of Soviet threat. But this was seen more in terms of the possibility of a military base or access gained through influence rather than hostile military intervention. The end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union brought an end to this US perception. While the Soviet involvement did not eventuate, the French maintained their involvement when they used their security forces in New Caledonia to suppress the 1984 – 1985
trouble between the Kanakas and the Polynesian people; and incursions by the Indonesian military into Papua New Guinea (PNG) territory in ‘hot pursuit’ of PNG rebels. Before the end of the 20th Century, the PIN saw the civil war in Bougainville, the collapse of the effective governance in the Solomon Islands, the coups in Fiji, and the unrest in Vanuatu and New Caledonia. The end of the cold war, the tragedy of September 11th 2001 and the terrorist attacks in Bali, Indonesia in October 2002 have completely changed both the global security environment and the perceptions of the international security community. Today the notion of security is assuming a more comprehensive, and multidimensional character.

**Key Security Challenges in the PIN**

7. Over the past eighteen years from the end of the Cold War, security, in its various manifestations, has evolved from what was regarded as essentially a domestic issue to be handled by local law enforcement agencies, to a security phenomenon which is confronting all of us in the world as well as the PIN. This global security phenomenon covers a very broad spectrum of security challenges; amongst them are terrorism, weapons of mass destruction (WMD), transnational crime, environmental degradation, climate change, infectious disease, piracy, resource protection, natural disasters, corruption, good governance, and ethnic problems. These security challenges are defined as non-traditional threats that cross borders and threaten the political and social integrity of the international communities. Terrorism, transnational crime, WMD, infectious disease, and piracy are regarded as more serious security concerns to the Western and the Asian countries than the PIN. However, the PIN are more concerned with the following security challenges: climate changes, natural disasters, ethnic problems, environmental degradation, transnational crime, resources protection, good governance, and corruption. Due to the time available, this paper will concentrate only on six of the above stated key security challenges to the Pacific Island Nations.
Climate Change

8. Climate change is perhaps the most strategic environmental challenge to the world particularly the PIN. The large-scale exploitation and utilization of energy resources by the developed countries is one of the major causes of environmental pollution and climate change, especially the release of carbon emissions. Many PIN consider climate change and global warming their most serious security threats, especially those low lying islands with limited land space, and human and financial resources such as the Marshall Islands, Tokelau and Tuvalu. The highest points in these islands are four meters above sea level. It is believed that these islands will disappear if the average temperature increases by 2º C as it will cause a 4m rise in sea-level in fifty years or so.

9. Climate change already threatens all key development sectors of the PIN. If the developed and industrial countries do not reduce emissions of greenhouse gases the following effects would be a probable scenario by the end of the 21st Century. First the temperature will have increased by 1º-3.5º C depending on the population and economic growth. Secondly, the rainfall will have decreased and there will be a reduction of food crops. The impact on the food crops was repeatedly addressed at the opening of the United Nation’s Food and Agriculture Organization PIN Ministers’ meeting in the Marshall Islands on 1st June 2007. Agriculture is particularly important because the livelihood of most island states depends on subsistence farming. Furthermore, living conditions, socio-economic activities and infrastructures, especially for those who are living in the coastal areas will be seriously affected.

10. The impacts of climate change in the PIN are already manifesting in coastal degradation, and in such extreme events as floods, storm surges, and increasingly severe cyclones. Some islands may become uninhabitable. Its predicted effect on sea levels could effectively result in the elimination of some or all of their territory. Changes in rainfall will affect water supplies thus putting pressure on commercial farmers and all
those living within the traditional subsistence economy. The outcomes of the G8 meeting in Japan this year are not sufficient to prevent dangerous impacts of the climate change occurring in the Pacific region. The G8 leaders agreed to a 50% reduction in greenhouse gasses by 2050, but the PIN expected at least an 80% reduction. Appropriate handling of the relationship between the exploitation and utilization of energy resources on the one hand, and environmental protection and climate change on the other, is an urgent issue facing all countries, particularly Pacific Island states.

Natural Disasters

11. While people in the Pacific are accustomed to natural disasters, but its psychological impact on the population is always dreadful and horrendous. The consequences of a natural disaster such as a tropical cyclone, flood, drought, tsunami or earthquake threaten both the economic prosperity and the security of the island states because of the enormous impact and catastrophic damage they can cause to the lives and properties of people in the South Pacific Region (SPR). This is illustrated clearly when one looks at the effect of the many cyclones that have visited the SPR in recent years.

12. During the period of 1986 to 1997, a total of approximately 29 tropical cyclones visited the SPR. Some of these cyclones claimed more than 100 lives and inflicted severe damage to property worth more than 200 million dollars. Due to the fact that most of the PIN are very small, their altitude above sea level is only a couple of meters, the location of each island group is very close to each other, and their economies are predominantly based on agriculture, any form or level of disaster which may strike any of the PIN could be catastrophic. The Tsunami in PNG in 1998 resulting in the deaths of thousands of people and the series of cyclones blowing through the PIN leaving behind trails of destruction and death are some of the real life examples of this side of the so called Pacific Paradise. Economic setbacks in most of the PIN have been the result of natural disasters which annually affect the region. Due to the vulnerability of the PIN each year to tropical cyclone, disaster preparedness and containment of the impacts of natural disasters are of great importance.
Ethnic Problems

13. Some strategists believe that the racial and ethnic divisions within a society sometimes lead to insurgency or secessionism. We can see that in the case of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. When the Malaitans migrated into Guadalcanal after the Second World War it was not a problem at the beginning. Several generations of Malaitans have settled amongst Guadalcanal people and there has been intermarriage between these two ethnic islands. The Government structurally adjusted the package imposed on the Solomon Islands in late 80s and the downsizing of the government has resulted in disgruntled elements linking with alienated youth to create a major security problem.

14. Ethnic and religious tensions are one of the key security challenges of growing concern to the PIN. Although the threat of such tensions is not a problem for some of the PIN, it is a serious concern for others including such culturally diverse states such as Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia, Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and French Polynesian. In most cases, ethnicity was mobilized for political and economic ends. The democratic defeat of the majority indigenous Fijian’ party in the 1987 general election in Fiji, resulted in the military coups which were represented as the assertion of indigenous Fijians in the face of threats from Indo-Fijians. The ethnically exclusive military was used to overthrow the Fiji Labour Party/National Federation Party Coalition Government led by an ethnic Fijian.

15. The Bougainville conflict provides another extreme case of this ethnic problem. This conflict began with a local dispute over environmental damage and the distribution of royalties from the Panguna copper mine, the conflict subsequently escalated to affect the safety of all Bougainvilleans. The conflict between the PNG state and secessionist rebels did claim several thousand lives and at times forced an estimated 70,000 people to leave their homes. Another ethnic problem was the one between the Kanaks and the Polynesian people of New Caledonia. In the mid 1990s, an ethnic problem exploded
directly at the white and Chinese interests in Papeete by largely Polynesian dock workers. These ethnic divisions and tensions have proved there negative impacts to the stability and the social economic development of the PIN.

**Environmental Degradation**

16. Environmental degradation continues to persist as one of the major security challenges throughout the world. Despite increasing global awareness about environmental issues, the state of environment continues to deteriorate, especially in the PIN, which are witnessing unprecedented levels of air, ground, and water pollution. Other environmental problems, such as land degradation and desertification, are also worsening. Today more than 900 million people around the world including the PIN are affected by desertification and drought, and that number will double by the year 2025.

17. PIN contend with most of the environmental problems, however environmental degradation is believed to present a number of security challenges to most countries in the Pacific Island states. In 1999, the Pacific Environment Outlook provided a comprehensive discussion of the major environmental problems experienced by the SPR then, and they still remain as of today the main environmental concerns for the PIN. Those major environmental problems experienced by the Pacific countries are as follows:

a. **Land degradation**, particularly in coastal lands, including coastal erosion, nutrient depletion, and soil erosion;

b. **Deforestation**, particularly in the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Niue, PNG, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. The causes include logging for timber exports, clearing for agriculture, clearing for mining and downstream effects of mining, and fuel wood collection;

c. **Biodiversity** losses affect a range of terrestrial and marine flora and fauna. Biodiversity loss is a function of ecological fragility of small islands, deforestation, expansion of agricultural land, fire, introduced species, degradation of reefs, and clearing of mangroves;
d. **Depletion** and availability of freshwater resources, particularly on low-lying coral atolls; and

e. **Coastal and marine degradation**, including coastal erosion, coral loss and coral bleaching, contracting artisanal fisheries, pollution of lagoon, and potential over fishing of oceanic stocks.

18. Environmental and natural resource issues can impede sustainable development efforts and promote regional instability. In Fiji, New Caledonia, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea, there are vast forestry and minerals resources. The biodiversity of these nations is great but the capacity for exploitation is even greater. Environmental degradation can lead to community conflicts, and dramatic social, economic and political changes.

**Transnational Crime**

19. The transnational crime issues are emerging as key security challenges for the PIN. Due to the vast ocean and the insecurity of the border control of most of the PIN, they have become one of the crossroads for transnational crime activities and criminal syndicates. Transnational threats in the South Pacific mirror many of the security issues found in the Asian countries. A variety of transnational crimes occur in the SPR, including drug trafficking, human smuggling, money laundering, armed robbery and cyber crime. Criminal organizations are taking advantage of globalization and loose border arrangements to disguise the scale and location of their operations.

20. Today there is a growing concern in the SPR at the rate of cultivation, use and the trafficking of drugs through the islands and within the individual PIN. A recent report of the Forum members on money laundering, notes that as other regions tighten up their financial controls the Pacific Forum countries, with relatively undeveloped financial and computer/information systems, become the next easy target for money laundering activities. The small land area of most of the PIN means that one successful fraud can create a disastrous effect on the country’s economy.
21. Another newer form of transnational crime is associated with people smuggling, a big business turning over an estimated US$7 billion annually. Cases have been reported that unauthorized boats were landed in New Caledonia, the Northern Marianas and Guam. In 1999 a boat carrying 120 potential illegal immigrants heading out to New Zealand, was arrested. With the increase in transnational crime in PIN together with the high cost in fuel, most PIN have a difficult time in maintaining their fisheries protection and cross border protection against transnational crimes. This will have an adverse impact on the government’s annual budget and ability to maintain a stable region.

**Resource Protection**

22. The PIN have long been concerned for the need to protect their physical environment. It is understood that generally speaking, the PIN have small land areas and populations and have limited resources. The PIN in many ways depend on their limited natural resources for their very existence.

23. This section will deal mainly with the challenges of protecting the ocean areas since the introduction of the 200 nautical miles Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). As I have stated earlier the PIN encompassed approximately 29.5 million square kilometers of sea water and .5 million square kilometers of land. All PIN have large ocean areas, and the ocean is their major economic resource, but there are enormous pressures on its fish stocks. The area of the central and western South Pacific supports the largest tuna fishery in the world. It has produced 41 per cent of the total annual tuna catch and 60 per cent of the global demand for canned tuna with a value of around US$3 billion annually.

24. Among the future security challenges island states will face in the protection of their EEZ is the on-going cost and lifespan of the Pacific Patrol Boat (PPB) programme offered by Australia through its Defence Cooperation Programme (DCP) with the Pacific Islands states. The patrol boats have a lifespan of fifteen to twenty years and Australia may or may not provide replacement vessels. This remains a significant security
challenge that requires dialogue between Australia and the Pacific island states concerned. Indeed, the Pacific islands also encounter budgetary difficulties with respect to maintenance and operation of their patrol boats in order to provide for resource protection. If Australia were to withdraw its financial, technical and advisory support, there is no doubt that the boats would spend less time at sea. Consequently, it would undermine other functions performed by the patrol boats, such as search and rescue, disaster relief operations and medical evacuation.

25. Furthermore, PIN should be aware of the international agreements that would affect their fish resources. There are two international trade developments that will impact on the region’s fisheries sector. First, is that the rules will relate to multilateral trade and second, is the negotiation of an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union (EU) which started in September 2002. Whatever the outcome of the negotiation in the WTO, it could have serious implications on the abilities of the PIN to receive payments for the fisheries sector in the future. These payments are fiscal incentives to help manage and control fishing activities. The inability of the governments of the SWP to protect their marine resources will directly undermine the livelihood of their population and the development of their economies.

Conclusion

26. Despite the efforts being made by some of the PIN traditional partners to alleviate non traditional security threats in the PIN it is possible that the occurrence of these threats is outside of their control. Although we may not be able to control the threats, we can be prepared for the effects.

27. There are no easy solutions to the security challenges faced by the PIN. Climate change, natural disasters, ethnic problems, environmental degradation, transnational crime and resource protection of the Pacific islands’ territorial integrity strategically and economically are the key security challenges that need to be addressed. These are not
new challenges but they will continue to pose the risk of precipitating social, economic and political instability in the region.

I wish you all a very pleasant stay in Tonga and a fruitful and successful dialogue. I also look forward to seeing the result of this important collaboration.

‘OFA ATU